

# Russian library digitizes collection of the oldest printed books

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Credit: Tomsk State University

Scientists at the TSU Research Library have digitized and issued a collection of 26 incunabula—early printed books published in Europe before 1501. One of these books, a medieval textbook about poetic dimensions published in 1500, is very rare. Only two copies of this edition are known in the world.

Although there are no well-known publications among the incunabula of the [collection](#), according to the Incunabula Short Title Catalogue (ISTC, British Library), one of the texts has been reported only in the collections of the TSU Research Library and in Germany.

"It is Fundamentum Scholarium. Deventer, a textbook on grammar, spelling, and metrics—that is, the science of poetic dimensions," explains Gennady Kvitko, an employee of the Department of Rare Books. "It is preserved in a convolute, an assembly of several publications under the same binding."

The earliest items in the collection of incunabula are dated to the year 1470. A significant part of the collection consists of medieval theological literature, in particular, the famous Malleus Maleficarum – "The Hammer of Witches." Editions of ancient authors, natural scientific works, and works of art are also represented in the collection.

One of the incunabula was donated by Kazan Federal University, and the rest came into the library with the collections of private libraries or bookstores. For many years, all of the incunabula texts were available only at European library sites, but in 2016, the TSU Research Library began digitizing its collection to allow access by a wide range of readers and professionals from around the world.

According to the library staff, each item of the collection is unique due to the owners' unique records, labels, or markings. That is why all extant incunabula interest researchers from around the world.

"All incunabula are monuments of the early history of printing, they have a great value," said Gennady Kvitko. "Comparing them with the later [books](#), you can see how the printing technology has evolved and the basic understanding of printed book."

**More information:** The digital collection of incunabula can be seen here: <http://vital.lib.tsu.ru/vital/access/manager/Collection/vital:3850>

Provided by Tomsk State University

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